

Barber Conable

November 5, 1974

When we got back from New Hampshire, Harry called and asked Nancy and me if we'd like to go out to dinner election night with BE and his little circle at Johnson House. This is his traditional election eve group--his oldest friends the Upson's and the family. Harry said BC would understand if I didn't want to come. I said I couldn't think of anywhere I'd rather be than with Barber--win or lose. Since I'd already gotten involved in the campaign emotionally and had been helping Barber all I could (and since Nancy had helped him so much, too) I had no hesitancy about going all the way. As I say I'd long since ceased to be a very good social scientist in this case--my note taking getting less and less and my participation getting more and more.

Anyhow, we went to dinner at Johnson House. Present were Barber, Charlotte, Sam, Emily, John and Eileen Riedman, Tom and Laura Benton, Dick and Jean Upson, Harry and us. Everybody was in good spirits but nervous.

John: How soon are we going to go through this again. Let's go.

Barber: If it comes out the way I think it's going to, we'll be at it again in 2 years."

The whole *atmosphere* changed when the gang from Riga brought in the 3 Riga districts--over an interval of maybe 20 minutes. Barber broke

out into a broad smile. "If the rural vote holds up like this, we'll be in good shape." Riga went 900-300^{1, 2} for Barber. I think he knew then, that he had won. He was running way ahead of the ticket--which meant that the voters were going to pick and choose and were not going to sweep him out with the rest. (When he saw the same thing in Henrietta and part of Greece--that he was running way ahead of the ticket and that the voters were going to be choosy, he told Harry to "Call Washington and tell them I'm all right.")

We went down to the Conable suite at the Holiday Inn to see if the rest went like Riga. Shirley was manning the tally room. Nancy and I sat on the bed. Tom, John, Harry and Barber came and went as the votes came in.

Harry brought news that Joel Broyhill had lost. "Joel Broyhill lost. That means I'm number two on the Committee. That means more than the loss of 40 Republican seats--to me personally." Then a little later, he came over and sat on the bed, almost giggling--"I can't begin to tell you how happy I am that Joel Broyhill lost. I'm embarrassed to feel so good about it."

He was disappointed only when Batavia came in. "I only won by 55%. I'll do better in the county as a whole. But they cut into me in the rural areas, no doubt about it. I guess I don't have the identification with the rural people I once had. I've spent too little time there and too much up here in Rochester. But I guess that means I don't have to owned by the rural part of the district anymore."

John says the other side made two "tactical errors." "They played to our strength out in the rural areas. And they spent too much money too early. They had nothing left at the end. They had no newspaper advertising in the town papers. We had two first page pictures in the Greece papers in the last week and a story. That can be crucial."

Needless to say, we were all pretty exuberant. I'd never seen Barber quite so deeply contented and visibly happy. The victory was no fluke. It was--considering Watergate and the effort put on by the opposition--a smashing, decisive victory. John Riedman had said all along that BC would win by 60% of the vote. I had guessed 54%. BC had said he'd be happy with an 18,000 margin. He never thought he would lose, but I don't think he dared hope for as much as he got.

On the other side, Peter obviously did not know what was going on, and he missed completely. It will be interesting to see why he failed so badly to understand the politics of the 35th district. My own guess is that Costanza, in the end, meant relatively little--that what BC lost, he lost because of general disallusionment with the state of things. People saw him as he said "as the government" and they took their unhappiness out on him to some degree. And that is perfectly natural. But they would have voted Democratic in protest, no matter who the Democratic candidate was, and Costanza probably didn't add a great deal to that protest--some but not a great deal.

On the other side, the interesting phenomenon was how deeply Barber's primary constituency cared about him--the intensity of their

loyalty. As soon as it was reported in the papers that BC would have a hard race, all of Conable's supporters came out to work ten times as hard. The money poured in; more people volunteered to help than ever before--more than they could use. The intensity of the commitment to Barber was exactly what he had planned on from the beginning of his career. It was the close supporters who pushed him to toot his own horn in the campaign. Ironically, the newspapersreporters--who were for Costanza and continually gave Barber the hatchet job in the papers--had the effect of strengthening Barber's hard core. They meant to help Costanza by painting her as the spunky, tough, aggressive challenger. And only succeeded in making Barber's supporters work harder. Yet they had to write anti-Conable stories in order to make Midge seem credible and receive money from her sources. The real interaction, therefore, was between each candidate and his or her strong supporters. The Costanza people had to talk themselves into thinking they were close in order to make Costanza seem viable and attract labor money. They more they did this publicity, the more they galvanized Barber's strong supporters and, then, Barber himself. In the end, it was the people who like Barber and believe in him that carried the day.

Of course, as John said to me as we left the Holiday Inn (about 11:30), "It's easy with a candidate like Barber." And, in the end, it seems to me, if you go to Washington and gain the enormous respect of people there, it does rub off back home. Dozens of Republicans were beaten yesterday--and in districts every bit as Republican as Barber's. It almost leads one to be a bit less cynical about politics--if you happen to be one

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of the best in the country, people notice. He is; and they did. (That ain't exactly social science!!)